

All Saints Day – 1 November 2009 – The Rev. Dr. Guy J.D. Collins

May I speak in the name of God, Giver, Forgiver and Lover. Amen.

Imagine a world in which you could see into the future. How would it change your life if you could see a snapshot of your future life? This is the premise of the new television show 'Flash Forward', in which the entire planet does just that. For two minutes and seventeen seconds every single human being blacks out, only to see a vision of their life six months in the future. Along with that vision comes all manner of questions and uncertainties, not least for the unfortunate few whose vision contains nothing.

Since before even Cassandra and the Oracle of Delphi humans have been mesmerized by the possibility that some have the special gift of second sight or prophecy. But now more than ever we are a culture obsessed by the future. In our information age what was science fiction just a few years ago is now standard issue consumer equipment.

Of course being clairvoyant is not easy. Time and again the ability to predict brings with it both temptation and danger. Cassandra was cursed with the knowledge that while she always saw the truth of the future, no one would ever believe her. Today, things are not so different with those who dare to look into the future. Our predictions may be more scientific today, but that does not make them any more palatable. Just think how hard it is for governments to respond to the reality of climate change.

Today on the feast of All Saints each of us is asked to take futurology seriously. And I don't mean that we are to study clairvoyance or think up new ways of predicting the future. No,

today, we are asked to remind ourselves that the Christian church has had its own Flash Forward long before television conceived of the idea. We just happen to know our Flash Forward by another name, the sacrament of Eucharist or communion.

I know that many believe that All Saints day is some kind of backwards looking day when we venerate and commemorate the saints who have gone before us. And that is an important part of what we do today. Later in the service each of you will be given an opportunity to light a candle in memory of loved ones who are no longer with us. That remembering is critically important to our communion today. But remembering is not simply about the past. During communion we are also challenged to imagine and see God's own vision of what the future holds for us. A future without fear, a future without suffering, a future without alienation and discord. That is why we remember the spectacularly creative vision of John that we heard in our second reading. A vision of hope and joy in which earth and heaven are fused in one new creation.

The truth about communion and eucharist is that every Sunday we are asked to flash forward in our own lives to a world where we take seriously the words and actions of our sacred meal. And that means each of us being as radically inclusive and as radically caring as Jesus. In the same way, when we baptize Siena, her parents are committing themselves to supporting Siena in making the vows of today real in the future. Without future actions the promises and vows of baptism do not become real. Baptism is the first step on a life-long journey, and only with regular nourishment in fellowship with others who follow Christ can any of us hope to make sense of our own baptisms. Equally, the flash forward of communion will

never be more than a temporary hallucination for any of us if our actions are not changed outside of this sacred space.

Theologians have debated for centuries the nature of communion. And for most of the time they have debated the wrong issue. They have argued among themselves about how Christ is present in the bread and wine. But the real question is not the relation of Christ to the bread and wine. The real question is the relation of Christ to those who receive and share the bread and the wine. Do we receive the sacrament and carry on our lives as if nothing had happened. Or when we receive the sacrament do we find ourselves renewed and inspired to live into the divine flash forward. A vision of the future in which each and every one of us plays our part in transforming not just ourselves, but our world.

In the tv show 'flash forward' the visions that some people have of the future are deeply disturbing. Some find themselves with different partners, while others find themselves living entirely different and unexpected lives. Be of no doubt, the same disturbance could happen to us were we to allow ourselves to genuinely respond to the flash forward of communion.

Communion takes us forward to another place, a place of justice, truth and peace. A place of equality that knows no divisions, a place of reconciliation and harmony without selfishness, a place of community that neither marginalizes or excludes, a place of love

that is abiding and eternal. It is into this divine location that Bruckner's music makes it so easy to feel transported to. But when the service finishes and the music ends and when we are outside the church and alone, then it is that God will call on each and every one of you to make the flash forward of communion incarnate and real in your life.

The truth of communion is that all of us are loved by God. Whether your dearest loves are with you today or gone before you, in communion we continue to discover that we are all present one to another. And while it might just not seem true for you right now, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. That is God's central promise in communion. Everything about our faith, from the lives of the saints to our Gospel story of the raising of Lazarus reminds us that God has a habit of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. The question for us remains, do we dare believe something so extraordinary? And will we allow ourselves to live extraordinarily in response to God? Only you can tell. And only you can imagine and reveal what the divine flash forward really means to you. Amen.